



## New Jersey Department of Agriculture Organic Certification Program

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### ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET FOR PRODUCERS

**What is Organic Agriculture?** Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that uses cultural, biological and mechanical methods to promote soil health, provide fertility, suppress disease, and manage insects and weed pests without relying on routine inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. An organic farmer uses management techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and promotion of beneficial insects to control pest populations and disease. When needed, organic agriculture utilizes natural materials rather than synthetic materials for fertility and pest control. Farm animals must be fed organic feed, have outdoor access, and be housed in a manner that allows them to engage in their natural behaviors. In addition livestock health care emphasizes prevention of disease and prohibits the use of antibiotics and hormones. Organic products may not be bio-engineered or genetically modified, subjected to irradiation, or produced with sewage sludge (biosolids).

**Certified Organic** farms are comprised of production areas (i.e. fields) that have had no prohibited substances applied in the 36 months prior to organic harvest, and are managed in accordance with the regulations, *7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program; Final Rule*, often called "The Rule".

**Process:** Farmers document the prior three-year histories of production areas and the organic management to be used on the NJDA organic certification forms provided in the application package. By completing the application forms, a grower creates their required "organic farm plan". Applications must be reviewed by the Supervisor and evaluated for completeness and compliance. Complete applications that appear to be compliant are referred to an independent, trained organic farm inspector who visits the farm to verify the plan. Once the inspection report is received, the application and inspection report are reviewed for compliance with the Rule. All methods and materials used by the operation for production are scrutinized. If an operation is found to be compliant, certification is granted and an organic certificate is issued. Certification is not a one time "pass / fail" event. Operations with multiple minor noncompliance, or with a major noncompliance, are typically given time to address the noncompliance and earn certification. The entire certification process can take between four and six months.

**Fees:** Certification fees are based on a sliding scale and start at \$285 for first-time applicants and \$235 for renewals. If an additional inspection is required to verify corrective actions, the operation must cover all additional inspection costs.

**Certification Regulations:** All certified organic operations have to be in compliance with the Rule. A copy of the regulatory text is provided to every applicant. For a preliminary look, you can access the rule on the NOP website at [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop).

**To receive more information:** Copies of the regulatory text are available and can be obtained by sending a request to the Supervisor. Application packages are available year round and require a \$25 payment that can be deducted from the certification fees during application.

Call the Organic Program for details, 609-984-2225, or e-mail: [erich.bremer@ag.state.nj.us](mailto:erich.bremer@ag.state.nj.us).